

Windows 8

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New personal computers (PCs) use the totally redesigned Windows 8 operating system. This article reviews some of the changes that PC users will encounter in this version. If you use an Apple Mac, iPod or iPad, you will already be familiar with some of these features.

NEW USER INFORMATION

My new Dell laptop was shipped with a thin, multi-language “quick start guide” that gave only basic details of how to set up the computer and connect it to the Internet. I miss the days when new computers came with thick manuals that described how to use them and how to solve problems. Now, the manufacturers provide that information in a help file on the computer or on a website. I still prefer a manual, where I can underline keywords and make marginal notes.

LOCK SCREEN

When Windows 8 starts up, it displays an initial “lock” screen that shows the time and date and some system status information. My quick start guide neglected to mention that I needed to click any key or mouse button to continue.

USERNAME AND PASSWORD

For added security, Windows forces you to provide a password each time that you restart the computer. It also insists that the primary user provide an

email address when you first register the operating system.

WINDOWS START SCREEN

The Windows Start button and Start menu have been replaced by an entire screen filled with icons (now called “tiles”) for preloaded application programs (apps). This screen is wider than most display screens, but you can use the left and right arrow keys to scroll from side to side. You can return to the Start screen at any time by clicking the Start (a.k.a. “Windows”) key on the keyboard. You can personalize the Start screen by clicking and dragging the app tiles.

APPS

When you open an app from the Start screen, it fills the entire display. If you move your mouse pointer to the lower left corner of the screen, a thumbnail icon of the Start screen appears. You may click on this icon to return to the Start screen. To see a list of all currently open apps, move the mouse pointer from this icon up along the left border of the screen. To scroll through all open apps, hold down the Windows key and repeatedly click the Tab key. To see a list of all available apps, right-click on a blank area of the Start screen then click on the “All Apps” icon that appears in the lower right corner.

DESKTOP

The Desktop is displayed by clicking on its tile on the Start screen. It is

similar to that in older versions of Windows. It displays icons for your major apps and a task bar at the bottom that includes an icon for Internet Explorer.

INTERNET EXPLORER

The version of Internet Explorer available on the Start screen is a very simple one. The icon on the Desktop toolbar opens the full version of this program.

CHARMS BAR

The Charms bar is a toolbar that allows users to control basic computer settings. The quickest way to display the Charms bar is to hold down the Windows button and press the “C” key. You can also show it by moving the mouse pointer to the upper or lower right corner of the display screen.

To turn off the computer, display the Charms bar, click on “Settings” and then on “Power.” This basic information was not even mentioned in my quick start guide.

FILE EXPLORER

The File Explorer (previously “Windows Explorer”) app is used to locate and organize your personal files. It replaces the previous “My Computer” and “My Documents” icons. For some reason, it is not listed among the common apps on the Start screen. The quickest way to find it is to go to the Start screen, then type the word “file” on the keyboard. This activates the Windows Search app and will display a link to File Explorer. As you gain experience with Windows 8, you will learn how to place a tile for File Explorer or other apps onto the Start screen.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Using Windows 8 is a totally new experience. Be prepared to invest time and effort in learning how to efficiently use its many new features.

Competing interests: None declared.

This will be Barrie McCombs’ last Out Behind the Barn column. We want to thank him very much for the 14 years he has been writing this column, and we wish him well in his future endeavours. The Editors, *CJRM*